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Looking for an out-of-print U.S. Government Publication?

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National Archives and Records Administration
Washington, DC

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Chances are the National Archives has it!

*Looking for a technical manual on
the Army's M-1 rifle?*

*... the study that prompted the
establishment of the National
Park Service?*

*... the first annual report of the
Treasury Department?*

*... the official transcript of the
Army-McCarthy hearings?*

If your search for a federal government publication has been exhaustive but unsuccessful, and you have not yet checked with the National Archives, you have one last place to try. If it is an out-of-print or superseded government publication, chances are the National Archives has it.

The federal government keeps its most important and valuable records in the National Archives. You may think of archives as handwritten manuscripts, like the original Declaration of Independence. But archives come in many forms — typed materials, photographs, maps,

films, drawings, and publications. The government considers its publications permanently valuable because they contain information on issues of national interest, and thus reflect its policies and programs. The National Archives has established a discrete grouping for these publications. It is known as Record Group 287, Publications of the U.S. Government.

You will find the subjects on which the government publishes information nearly limitless. Titles range from newsworthy best sellers like *United States — Vietnam Relations, 1945-1967*, popularly known as the "Pentagon Papers," to specialized reference tools, like *Tables of Sines and Cosines to Fifteen Decimal Places at Hundredths of Degree*. Topics include celebrations and assassinations, diplomats and street people, outer space and interior design, infants and senior citizens, things living (marihuana, spies, goldfish) and things inanimate (concrete, crab pots, atomic weapons).

Every form of publication is represented, from a single-page memo on health benefits for federal employees to the 130 volumes of *The War of the Rebellion, A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*. There are multivolume sets, pamphlets, fact sheets, guides, and manuals — circulars, bulletins, journals, questionnaires, and newsletters — monographs, digests, indexes, reports, and regulations.

No matter what your area of expertise, the federal government has undoubtedly published something of interest to you. There is the *Index Medicus* for health care professionals, the *Register of Historic Places* for historians, regulations on pension and health care eligibility for veterans, foreign-language manuals for prospective travelers, military uniform specifications for toy soldier manufacturers, special diet cookbooks for cancer patients, rules for registering land claims for land speculators, the endangered species list for environmentalists. The seemingly endless rows of shelves in the National Archives Building hold printed information covering the details and the generalities of virtually every sphere of human knowledge.

The copy of each publication that is in the National Archives is designated the *record copy*. It is identical to thousands of other copies printed and distributed by

the Government Printing Office and other government agencies, but it is cared for in a different way. The record copy cannot be loaned; it is handled as infrequently as possible; it is stored in a controlled environment to retard its deterioration. When necessary, the latest technology is used to assure the preservation of the publication's content. The National Archives' copy is the one that is sure to exist when others have been lost, damaged, misplaced, or otherwise made unavailable. Once a publication gets to the National Archives, it is there permanently and is always available for anyone who might need to use it.

Congress established the National Archives in 1934 as the official depository for government publications and all other federally created records. The Archives received the largest single addition to its holdings of government publications in 1972, when the Government Printing Office transferred the Superintendent of Documents collection of 1.8 million printed items. The earliest titles date back to the beginnings of the federal government in 1789. Currently, the Archives receives publications from the Government Printing Office and all other federal agencies approximately 5 years after they are printed.

The National Archives has the most inclusive, permanent collection of U.S. Government publications in existence. The official count is 2.4 million items. They are stored at the National Archives Building in downtown Washington. The staff answers several hundred oral and written inquiries each month, fills thousands of orders each year for electrostatic and microform copies of publications, and maintains the collection in the best possible condition.

Although you may eventually come to the National Archives for a publication you need, the Archives is not necessarily the place to start searching for an out-of-print or superseded government publication. You cannot borrow the Archives' copy, and you must pay a fee for photocopies. Your search should begin, not in Washington, but on the local level, at a depository library.

Congress established the depository library program in the 19th century to provide widespread, free, public access to federal publications, thus fulfilling its obliga-

tion to inform the public about federal policies and programs. Today, there are nearly 1,400 congressionally designated depository libraries throughout the United States. You will not find all government publications in every depository library. If you are looking for an 1896 government publication, for example, you may find the nearest depository library's holdings date back only to 1940. In such a case, a librarian will assist you by finding a depository library that does have the publication and in acquiring it through interlibrary loan or by contacting the National Archives if the publication is not available elsewhere.

No matter what sort of government publication you are looking for, you should keep two facts in mind. First, government publications may be omitted from a library's card catalog, so it is important to ask a librarian for assistance. Many libraries have a government publications librarian on the staff. Second, when noting the bibliographic citation for a government publication be sure to include its title, author (often the creating agency), date, and call number.

If you need to contact the National Archives about a government publication, you can visit us at 7th and Pennsylvania Avenue, NW., or write to the Library and Printed Archives Branch (NNIL), National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC 20408. You will need to provide our staff with as complete a citation as possible — title, author, date, and call number. Our reply will note the availability of the requested publication, cost, and procedures for placing an order.



National Archives and
Records Administration
Washington, DC 20408

General Information Leaflet
Number 28
1986

